



Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits



Toward Healthy
Jesuit Community Living
Some Psychological Reflections

Charles M. Shelton, S.J.

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THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

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Gilles Cusson, S. J.

Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises

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Gilles Cusson is director of an Ignatian spirituality center in Quebec and founder and editor of the quarterly journal *Cahiers de Spiritualité Ignatienne*. Formerly he was a member of the faculty of the Gregorian University in Rome and director of the Jesuit "tertianship" in Quebec. He has had extensive experience in directing retreats, courses, and study sessions in North America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Gilles Cusson, S. J.

The Spiritual Exercises Made in Everyday Life

A method and a biblical interpretation. Translated by Mary Angela Roduit, R.C., and George E. Ganss, S.J. 1989, 161 pp., bib.

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Gilles Cusson, S.J., is author also of *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, another of the new and recent books from the Institute of Jesuit Sources presented in this catalog. He draws here both on the biblical theology of that earlier book and on his extensive personal experience in directing retreats in everyday life.

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For your information . . .

As I said in an issue of *Studies* exactly two years ago, "[o]ne of the most pleasant of these columns to write every year is the one in which I can introduce . . . those men who have been able to accept [the] invitation [to become new members of the Seminar] and who will serve for the next three years." This time the new members are Allan Deck and Thomas Stahel.

But before I begin to tell you a bit more about them, there is also the bittersweet activity of saying goodbye to the departing members and of thanking them on behalf of us all for their work on the Seminar. This year James DiGiacomo and Mark Link will be leaving us. Jim, who has spent three years on the Seminar, is a teacher of theology at Regis High School in New York, a prolific author and well-known speaker on the subject of high-school religious education, and a man brave enough to write among his many books one entitled *Understanding Teenagers: A Guide for Parents*. Mark has been a member for only one year but, alas, will have to leave us because of the press of other responsibilities. He, too, is well-known as an author and speaker. *Books in Print* lists some twenty editions of his books presently available, ranging from *Psalms for Today* to *Illustrated Sunday Homilies*.

As for the new members, Thomas H. Stahel, a member of the New Orleans Province, is presently the executive editor of *America* magazine in New York. He has a background in English literature, was managing editor of *America*, wrote its column "The Word" for four years, served from 1977 to 1983 as provincial superior of the New Orleans Province, and taught at the Jesuit novitiate in Paraguay from 1983 to 1985. As one of the members of the editorial staff of *America*, week in and week out he has pen in hand or hand on keyboard. Allan Figueroa Deck is a member of the California Province. He has a background in theology and, after several years as a member of the faculty at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, has recently become coordinator of Hispanic pastoral programs at the Center for Pastoral Studies and lecturer in theology and Hispanic ministry at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Allan has both worked in and written about Hispanic ministry. He has most recently written the book *The Second Wave: Hispanic Ministry and the*

Evangelization of Cultures and has edited the forthcoming *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*.

We are also welcoming back from sabbatical a present member. During the last year Gerard Stockhausen of Creighton University and Campion House, Omaha, has been teaching economics at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

Every once in a while someone asks whether there are any other publications like *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* or other groups like the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality. The simple answer is Yes and No, and the complete answer is complicated. There are better than a dozen centers of Ignatian spirituality around the world, including the one in Rome at the Jesuit curia or headquarters. In some ways the Seminar is such a center but like no other one. Our members are not all located in one place or engaged full-time at our center. Rather they are all occupied full-time in a great variety of other Jesuit works. Except for the chairman, we serve a term limited to three years. We meet five times a year over five long weekends. Our publication, *Studies*, is almost always a monograph on a single subject and is written explicitly for Jesuits of the United States. Others, of course, Jesuit or not, are most welcome to read and use the journal. *Studies* is one of more than thirty reviews of Jesuit and Ignatian spirituality published in approximately twenty countries. But it is unusual in that it comes, not from a permanent editorial board of its own, but from the Seminar. The actual production is done with the help of the Institute of Jesuit Sources, a research and publication enterprise, itself independent of the Seminar, devoted to the history and spirituality of the Society of Jesus. Complicated? Perhaps so, but the whole project of Seminar and *Studies* has worked well up to now as it comes close to beginning its twenty-fifth year. But you will hear more about that later.

John W. Padberg, S.J.

Editor

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Toward Healthy Jesuit Community Living

Some Psychological Reflections

I. Introduction

All Jesuits can agree that living “healthy” lives is a noble goal. Given this reality, it seems an equally valid goal that the environments in which Jesuits live should also be “healthy.” Our focus for this paper is the “health” of our communities. I would ask the reader to take a moment and consider the following two questions: **How would you envision a “healthy” Jesuit community?** The second question: **How would you like your community to function by the year 2000?** No doubt most communities by the year 2000 will be smaller and older. Manpower shortages and aging lead to some daunting challenges and problems, yet the key question is the quality of community life;¹

¹ My focus here is on a **communal** understanding of psychological health. In a sense this article can be viewed as a companion piece to my earlier reflections focusing on **individual** mental health. See Charles M. Shelton, S.J., “Reflections on the Mental Health of Jesuits,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 23, No. 4 (September 1991). Hereafter this essay will be cited as “Reflections.”

Charles M. Shelton, S.J., is a licensed psychologist in private practice and assistant professor of psychology at Regis University in Denver. A frequent writer, lecturer, and consultant on psychological matters, he has published books on adolescent spirituality and pastoral psychology. His most recent book is entitled *Morality of the Heart: A Psychology for the Christian Moral Life*. His address is Regis Jesuit Community, 3333 Regis Avenue, Denver, CO 80221.

for dependent on this are the forgiveness and care religious need in order to live as loving brothers and well-functioning adults.²

It has been nearly three decades since Vatican II called for the renewal of religious charisms. Over the past twenty years, a plethora of books and articles on the vows and religious life have appeared. Moreover, in the United States Assistancy many communities are undergoing positive changes, including physical and structural alterations and attempts to expand effective dialogue among community members. This article seeks to stimulate public discussion about this vitally important topic. My hope is that it will serve as a catalyst for addressing the many "tough issues" that need to be raised among us, and for deciding what it means to live together as brothers and to confront some of the "family secrets"³ we have buried for too long. Again, the focus for our

² The reader will reflect on this document in light of current and recent community experiences. Hence, if one's current community situation is problematic, there may be a built-in "negativity bias" when reading this article, reflected in a statement such as, This will never work. The reader is urged to reflect on this document in light of one's history of community rather than any one or two community experiences.

³ Throughout this paper I will use the expression "family secrets." I do not mean to suggest that the Jesuit community can be simply equated with the institution of the family. Though there is some overlap between these two systems, they are not the same. Nor am I suggesting that a community be deprived of its legitimate right to privacy, which excludes some topics from being shared with externs, or for that matter privacy within the house (information known only to the superior and/or his consultors). I define "family secrets" as topics or experiences within the community or the province that do not surface for discussion because such topics are emotionally charged and because individuals, communities, or provinces, as a result of their lack of maturity or the presence of dysfunctionality, are unable to discuss them in an honest way. I would suggest that such family secrets are operative throughout various subsystems of any province; that is, within communities, within consultors' groups, within province staffs, and so forth. Examples of these questions on a community level might include not confronting a substance-abusing Jesuit about his drinking, inability to discuss certain issues (for example, interpersonal conflicts), or perhaps even admitting that many Jesuits in the community really don't like one another. On a province level it might include acknowledging that we don't have enough qualified men to be

discussion is the Jesuit community of the twenty-first century—what it can become and what each of us can do starting now to accomplish this end.

As a prelude to our discussion on healthy Jesuit communities, some preliminary considerations are warranted.

First, I do not find it odd that many Jesuit communities are unhealthy. As I have pointed out elsewhere,⁴ Jesuit life in many ways simply mirrors our culture. Mental-health issues ranging from developmental immaturity and behavioral quirks to substance abuse and severe mental illness are the United States' No. 1 problem, and they are the greatest problem facing the Society as well.⁵ Naturally, then, individuals who are hurting and who interact within a community whose climate or structure is problematic are, I think, bound to create difficult living situations for all involved.

Second, there are numerous ways to study Jesuit community life, and the following discussion is only one approach. One could, for example, do a historical study of Jesuit community or analyze community structures using organizational and systems approaches. By training I am a clinical psychologist and I approach the study of Jesuit community from a psychological perspective. More specifically, I incorporate a behavioral model of health and insights from psychology on the meaning of mature adult living. Furthermore, clinical psychology is noted for its rigorous analysis of research data. Unfortunately, there exist few data for the discussion that follows. Consequently, most of what I offer in these pages is speculative. It is based on (a) my training as a clinical psychologist, (b) my own living of and observations on Jesuit life, and (c) discussions I have had with numerous Jesuits

first-rate superiors or that all the efforts put into province planning have come up short because the province doesn't have available enough well-functioning men to achieve its goals.

⁴ Shelton, "Reflections," 2.

⁵ Here I am expressing a personal opinion.

regarding our living together. The reader is invited to add to, subtract from, accept or disagree with what he finds within these pages.

Third, the task of addressing the meaning of Jesuit community is itself intimidating. Why? Because our communities are so diverse. There exist novitiates for the young and infirmaries for the elderly. Typical apostolic communities range from two- and three-man parish teams all the way to large university houses. There are, additionally, provincial houses, philosophates, and houses of special studies. Training differences, individual temperaments, and personal ideologies that vary within as well as among houses and further contribute to diversity. Even though these issues are significant, they must not become so central as to preclude a discussion of how we live together. What we need instead is the authentic desire to apply insights about healthy community living to our own situation and community, to the extent that such applications can be made, and the commitment to bring about changes that improve the quality of our lives together.

Fourth, assertions in the following pages involve a “more or less” phenomenon. No community is totally healthy, nor, I might add, will such a community ever exist. We are a group of all too fragile brothers desiring to live in fraternal charity as we seek to promote and serve the Gospel. Given our human fragility, disappointments are inevitable. Although we each want our communities to be the best they can be, we must acknowledge that no community will ever totally appropriate the gospel message and the charism we authentically desire to live.⁶ At the same time, we must continuously strive to commit ourselves to examining how we can become healthier in our communities, in order to avoid frustration and disillusionment in living our Jesuit ideals.

⁶ My own impression is that we Jesuits are often very idealistic men. For men who bring such idealism to community life, the disappointment and frustration that arise when communities do not live up to these ideals render us vulnerable to much hurt and disappointment. Such feelings can spawn an unacknowledged cynicism and pessimism regarding community life. We simply need to acknowledge these feelings and the toll they might take.

Finally, I realize that much of what I say will be interpreted as a critique of the Society as it currently exists. I do not object to this interpretation of my reflections. At a more fundamental level, however, I ask every Jesuit reading this article to view these reflections as positive. I entered the Society of Jesus in 1972. At that time a critique such as this could never have been written. Even ten years ago, when I was engaged in theological studies preparatory to ordination (1982), I seriously doubt that we as a body could have heard or discussed what is contained in these pages. Indeed, we have grown, and as we approach the year 2000 we Jesuits are slowly acquiring the ability and insight to initiate this discussion in a public manner. Thus, this self-critique is a compliment to our own growth and an encouragement for each of us to sustain and widen the dialogue.

Having offered these preliminary considerations, we will now state three theses touching upon Jesuit life. (I ask the reader to consider the extent to which he agrees with each statement.) I will then set forth a definition of a “healthy Jesuit community” and the characteristics that bring such a community into being. (Here the reader might reflect on the degree to which he accepts this definition and these characteristics.) Afterwards I will offer a personal experience of a Jesuit community that is attempting to become more healthy. (The reader might monitor his personal reaction to what I say.) Finally, I will offer some final thoughts and an appendix (A) containing questions that might help provincials, staffs, superiors, communities, and individual Jesuits focus on the points raised in these pages. I will then add a second appendix (B) for Jesuits, to help them begin or continue an ongoing group discussion about issues and topics vital for our current lives and future viability.

II. The Need to Focus on Community

Why focus on community? One answer, of course, is that community exists as an integral part of Jesuit life. Therefore it deserves examination.⁷ One document that has spoken directly to our communal lives as brothers is the Thirty-second General Congregation's "The Union of Minds and Hearts." The document speaks eloquently of our "brotherly communion" that encompasses being in relationship and arriving at a "communitarian discernment." In essence, our lives as Jesuits cannot be divorced from this fraternal communion. As a Jesuit I desire to subscribe to these noble goals. On the other hand, as a clinical psychologist I maintain that such goals are not possible without the health I speak of in this paper. In other words, I believe that threaded through this document is the implicit call for what I term community health. Without a communal health which incorporates such attributes as honesty, trust, meaningful dialogue, and well-functioning adult behaviors, this "union of minds and hearts" to which the general congregation summons us is to a great extent beyond our grasp. In my view, a commitment to community health best ensures that the vision the congregation spreads before us will be realized. From another perspective, the lack of community health is the single greatest obstacle to the renewal envisioned by the Thirty-second and other recent congregations.

But in addition to the above argument that the Society has called us to reflect in our communal lives an interpersonal communion that is healthy and maturing, there exist pressing external issues we must face squarely. Given an increasingly aging Society, the decline in vocations, and the gradual shrinking in abso-

⁷ As I already stated, this article centers on the psychological health of communities. Those interested in a spirituality for Jesuit community life should see Michael J. Buckley, S.J., "Mission in Companionship: Of Jesuit Community and Communion," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 11, No. 4 (September 1979).

lute numbers, we must now more than ever before address the issue of healthy community living.⁸

I seek to broaden our view of Jesuit community life by examining three areas wherein the role of community is central to our Jesuit lives as we approach the twenty-first century.

Thesis 1: Healthy communities are a vital component of the Jesuit's spiritual and psychological health and essential to his optimal apostolic functioning.

Contemporary models of mental health stress the unity of biological, psychological, and social variables to help us understand the etiology of mental illness and thus to promote psychological health. This perspective is termed a biopsychosocial approach. The following is a brief sketch of this model as applied to Jesuit life. Biological variables would include the Jesuit's temperament (loosely defined as one's tendency towards emotional expression). One Jesuit, for example, might be more impulsive or expressive than another. Such a disposition helps to condition how others might respond. Psychological factors come into play when we explore the Jesuit's unique learning history and significant life experiences. An early childhood loss, for example, might figure significantly in a Jesuit's capacity to trust in his interpersonal relationships. Cultural and environmental factors best express the social part of this model. In the present context, a Jesuit's

⁸ I refer anyone doubting the reality of aging to the November 1991 issue of the *National Jesuit News*. On page 9 there is a graph that profiles the age spread of the 4,810 Jesuits in the United States at the end of 1991. "Of these 4,810 Jesuits, 25% are 70 or over, 50% are 60 or over, and 75% are 47 or over." One must ask what influence such aging has on our attempts to live a healthy life in community. What will this influence be in ten years as we age even more and attract even fewer younger members? By posing this question I am not trying to make health an "age" issue. Certainly some older Jesuits are healthy and some younger Jesuits evince questionable psychological health. Nonetheless, this aging is a reality and the influence of this aging on community life and health must be discussed.

mental health is sustained or undermined by the community (environment) in which he lives.⁹

To grasp the truth of this final statement, consider the following examples: Jesuit A works very hard—too hard. Work preoccupies his life. We must ask about the long-term consequences of such workaholic tendencies. Would it not be helpful to have a communal experience wherein the community provides some boundaries for such work? In addition, should not the community itself offer an experience where the Jesuit might relax and be able to communicate some of his needs, so that an overloaded work schedule will not cause them to be ignored? Would not a healthy community provide some challenge to the man, reflecting its care and concern for him? Sadly, there are most likely cases where a Jesuit's incessant work occurs as a means to fill up an emotional vacuum created by a poorly lived community experience. Lacking the affective pull of positive community experiences and unable to face the barrenness of community life and the emotional void it creates, the Jesuit falls back on his own resources and works to excess.

Another example: Jesuit B is experiencing a personal crisis. How many times have brother Jesuits passed him in the hall, said the customary "Hi," received the same response in return, and then passed on, going about their various pursuits? Perhaps several Jesuits sense more or less clearly that something "might be up" in Jesuit B's life, but they are preoccupied and do not follow up on their suspicions. Think how advantageous it would be to have some type of weekly forum where Jesuit B might share his concerns so other Jesuits could know what is happening, or where other Jesuits could bring up in the group their own concern for him. Would not this Jesuit feel more bonded to the Society and cared for (which is a basic human need) if he was in-

⁹ For a detailed discussion of environmental factors influencing health, see Daniel Stokols, "Establishing and Maintaining Healthy Environments: Toward a Social Ecology of Health Promotion," *American Psychologist* 47 (January 1992): 6-22.

volved in a positive group experience? Again, we must ask about the long-term consequences for both Jesuits A and B. What will eventually happen to them and countless others like them if they do not reside in healthy communities? My own observation is that these short vignettes and numerous similar stories are, sadly, the life histories of many of us. Unfortunately, often men such as these become the “walking wounded”—men who are hurting, are feeling unappreciated, and are psychologically adrift. Far too often, in order to deal with their pain, they adopt denial as their coping style, manifesting it in destructive ways. Some of the unhealthy ways Jesuits cope with their loneliness and pain are the bottle, workaholism, cynicism, absence from the community, passive-aggressiveness, superficial communication, and excessive television watching.¹⁰

More broadly, Jesuit community life often creates what I label the **vertical Jesuit syndrome**. This “syndrome” is manifested in a life-style that includes investment in apostolic work and the maintenance of individual Jesuit friendships, but no participation in a regularly scheduled shared group dialogue.¹¹ I wish the reader to consider the following as he reads: **Can a man live an optimally healthy Jesuit life without an ongoing shared group dialogue to which he is committed?** My own belief is that without this communal dialogue the quality of Jesuit life is not optimized and as a result each Jesuit’s emotional, apostolic, and spiritual life suffers to some degree.

¹⁰ I invite the reader to take these or other unhealthy behaviors and apply them to himself, asking, How often do I engage in these behaviors and what might such behavior(s) say about how I deal with my own emotional states? One might also reflect on how such behaviors are manifested in brother Jesuits. However, **we each must start first with ourselves.**

¹¹ Some Jesuits gain support through groups associated with their work. For example, meetings of provincials, superiors, or presidents. However, I view it as doubtful that such infrequent meetings can provide the support offered from a regularly scheduled meeting with members of one’s own community.

Thesis 2: The long-term effectiveness of the Society as an apostolic community will increasingly depend upon the quality of our life together.

A lay psychologist friend who has periodically done psychological assessments for applicants to religious communities once remarked that he was impressed by how many applicants stress the importance of community when discussing their decision to enter religious life. I think more and more that a person's becoming a Jesuit is as much his choosing the Society as the Society's choosing the man. If we are to attract healthy and committed men to the Society, then we need above all to display behaviors within our communities that provide and sustain mature human growth and adult ways of behaving. Young adults value honesty and need healthy adult models; we must provide an environment that affords both these and other valuable supports.¹² Furthermore, we must offer men experiences that provide for adaptive and mature growth. If we do not make concerted efforts to call one another to a mature adult living of our communal life, then, in effect, we force young adults (those in formation) to adopt unhealthy defensive behaviors in order to survive within the Society! Unchallenged dysfunctional behaviors become models for the Society's younger members and, tragically, all too often are regarded as the norm. Though this is perhaps too simply put, if we do not get our act together and confront the dysfunctionality of our communities, then we merely perpetuate unhealthy living by forcing one another to adopt defensive strategies (some of which are unhealthy) in order to cope with this dysfunctionality. The long-term consequences of such behaviors will only further impair us.

A second aspect of our long-term effectiveness concerns the continued exodus of good men from the order. Obviously a vocation is a complex reality that incorporates mystery (grace), one's psyche, and a unique life history. Without wishing to downplay

¹² In developmental psychology young adulthood is often defined as the years twenty to forty.

this complexity, I have the impression that the reason some men leave is, to some degree, the dysfunctional nature of community life.¹³ An analogy to marriage is pertinent. One could be married and wish to continue in the marriage, but find the spouse's behavior and temperament so problematic or abusive that it becomes destructive for one to continue. Certainly the Lord does not ask us to destroy our own mental health and remain in such a union. Some healthy men who leave the Society, I think, are faced with this dilemma.¹⁴ They experience our communities as impoverished and offering little hope. When making a vowed commitment, one must embrace enormous sacrifice and suffering; indeed, such sacrifice is part and parcel of the commitment. But, in order to endure such suffering in a healthy manner, the individual must glimpse some hope. Some of our men who have suffered continuous pain and hurt within dysfunctional communities develop a slow and insidious "myopia" where the situation looks so bleak, so hopeless, that for the sake of their own health they feel they must leave.¹⁵ I am personally saddened by such departures, but I do understand and respect these decisions. It brings me sorrow to recall one poignant instance of this. While

¹³ One might argue in refutation of this assertion that men have always departed the Society on a somewhat consistent basis. No doubt this is true, but this could simply be evidence that community life has always been dysfunctional to some degree and in part responsible for some men's leaving. Also, in view of the greater scrutiny and more sophisticated screening processes these past few decades, we must look elsewhere for an explanation of why so many well-intentioned and well-scrutinized men still continue to leave the Society. I simply do not believe it is all "the man." In some cases, I believe, a lack of community health is partly responsible.

¹⁴ By no means do I want to imply that a man can look only at the community as a source of his vocational questioning. On the contrary, a man must honestly and critically probe his own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as well. However, in this article my focus is community living, so I am stressing the dysfunctional nature of community living and its influence on vocational commitment.

¹⁵ I do believe that in some instances this myopia is based on accurate perceptions of community situations.

discussing his upcoming departure, one younger Jesuit said to me: "You know, Charlie, this community thing seems like it's never going to change. If I thought it would I might not be leaving, but it's too late now. There's too much hurt. I want to live a healthy and happy life and I just can't do it in a Jesuit community. It's too unhealthy and so many guys are just miserable!"

In a similar vein, I recall one Jesuit who told me that leaving the Society was a matter of a personal decision between a man and God and did not really involve the community. As both a Jesuit and a psychologist, I could not disagree more. My objection does not lie in the substance of such a statement, but in its incompleteness. A man who chooses to leave the order makes this decision **within the context of ongoing community living**. Contemporary models of both moral theology and mental health stress the importance of viewing the person in context. We must view departures from the Society in this same light; we must not fail to ask what role the community living conditions (context) exercise in the departures of some men.

Consider the following. After a hard day's work, a young Jesuit priest goes to the recreation room at 9 P.M. He is tired and looks forward to some companionship, a few brothers with whom he can share his day. When he arrives in the recreation room, he finds he is again disappointed. One Jesuit who is always withdrawn sits in the corner with his newspaper. Several yards away sit two Jesuits who are known throughout the community for their cynicism and bitterness; characteristically, they are complaining. Feeling a twinge of sadness and disappointment, the Jesuit stays a minute and then retires to his room in frustration. Eventually, these negative feelings grow in intensity as the man continues to experience isolation and disappointment in his living situation. As a psychologist I ask myself, What are the long-term consequences of such experiences over time for this Jesuit's vocational commitment? No doubt there are many ways to cope with and defend against such negative feelings (for example, workaholism, excessive television watching). Unfortunately, another way is eventually to leave the Society.

Consider again the example above. Over a period of time this man will experience a dissonance arising from two contrary beliefs. The first is, I am a Jesuit; and the second is, I am feeling frustrated, lonely, and disappointed. In the long run, the Jesuit will have to resolve this dissonance. According to social psychological theory, one way to resolve dissonance is to change one of the person's beliefs. Accordingly, one way for this Jesuit to diminish his dissonance is to admit his negative feelings and reflect that perhaps he is in the wrong life: the Jesuit vocation is not for him. Thus, the belief, I am a Jesuit, with the passage of time becomes, Maybe the reason I am not happy as a Jesuit is that I don't belong in Jesuit life, and finally takes concrete form as, The Lord is calling me to leave the Society. This would resolve his dissonance; for he could now conclude that his negative feelings stem from his being a Jesuit and would dissipate if he would leave the Society,¹⁶ thus erroneously assuming that the Lord is inviting him to leave the Society! If such a Jesuit left, he might or might not be less lonely, disappointed, and frustrated. He might find commitment in a love relationship that would to a significant degree assuage his negative feelings, though, to be sure, such a commitment is no guarantee that such feelings will diminish.¹⁷

While the above example admittedly explains only in part any man's decision to leave the Society, I think it contains more than a kernel of truth. Again, we need to face the question, What are the long-term consequences of living community lives that are

¹⁶ The need to resolve one's dissonance through leaving the Society is apt to be reinforced if the man believes his community will not change or that superiors and province officials will do nothing to alter such difficult community-living situations. In other words, a subtle but insidious hopelessness about Jesuit life is apt to fuel the urgency for departure.

¹⁷ We Jesuits need to educate ourselves regarding the complex processes of human decision making so vital for any discernment to enter or leave religious life. For an introduction to these cognitive processes associated with decision making, see Michael J. O'Sullivan, S.J., "Trust Your Feelings, but Use Your Head: Discernment and the Psychology of Decision Making," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 22 (September 1990).

disappointing, painful, and often seemingly hopeless? As we saw previously, oftentimes the recourse is to develop unhealthy defenses; for some the answer lies in leaving the Society. I think it is both naive and overly spiritualized simply to say that the decision to take leave of the Society is merely a matter of a man's relationship with God. We must expand this statement in such a way as to acknowledge that the environment (community) in which the Jesuit lives exercises a very significant role in his perception and understanding of his vocation, and that negative community experiences over a period of time might adversely influence a man's perception of and commitment to his vocation.

To argue this point from a more personal perspective, I invite the reader to join me in the following exercise. Stop reading this article and sit quietly for a few moments. Close your eyes and picture in your mind every Jesuit you know who has left the order in the last seven years. Spend a few moments with each of these men, imaging them in your minds and reflecting on each of their experiences of Jesuit life. Now, as you think about each man, try to envision what each of these men's lives would have been like if he had experienced throughout his Jesuit life a loving, caring, and supportive community.¹⁸ What would each of these men have felt, what would have been each of these men's attitudes towards his vocation if he had experienced adequate support? In doing this exercise myself, I most certainly find that in the long run it would not have made any difference in many cases. Many of these departing men were simply not called to live the Jesuit life. On the other hand, I have in mind also specific men who I am convinced would still be Jesuits today if they had experienced a more healthy and supportive kind of community

¹⁸ Clearly, no Jesuit is always going to live in such supportive environments. Nevertheless, always experiencing a supportive community environment is a noble goal that Jesuits deeply desire and always strive toward, just as we strive continually to promote the ideals of the Gospel in an imperfect world.

life during their years as Jesuits.¹⁹ Such departures are tragic and sad. Although we need to be concerned about low entrance numbers, we also need to be concerned about the continued hemorrhaging taking place as more and more good and talented men leave. We need to confront this issue: **What role does the lack of healthy community life exercise in these departures?**

I believe there are two major reasons we avoid publicly discussing the health of our communities. First, it would force us to confront directly how dysfunctional our community life is and how many of us protect this “family secret” we would rather not acknowledge. We find it too threatening to examine seriously the psychologically impoverished state of many of our communities and to confront directly the depression, the loneliness, and the substance abuse prevalent in so many of them. Moreover, posing this question of community health publicly would no doubt allow much conflict to surface as feelings within the community come to the fore. Let’s face this issue squarely. For the most part, we Jesuits simply don’t know how to admit and negotiate interpersonal conflict. The psychologist Susan Heitler has written that “the health of any given system, be it an individual, couple, or group, can be seen as a function of its ability to negotiate conflicts.”²⁰ If Heitler’s statement is accurate—and I do believe that it

¹⁹ Obviously a man’s leaving the Society is tied to the internal forum. Even so, I am often struck by the degree of silence that accompanies so many men’s departures; I wonder if this lack of discussion is tied to a “family secret” among us. In addition, though, I have on several occasions witnessed something equally disturbing. After some men have departed, I have heard Jesuits remark that the man was miserable and simply wasn’t suited to community living. This strikes me as a form of scapegoating. Instead of critically examining the degree to which the community might be at fault (for example, the lack of health within the community fostered the man’s departure), we put the responsibility solely on the man! In addition to scapegoating, this seems to me to be a subtle form of Jesuit narcissism; that is, we assume we are so “together” that it must be the man and not ourselves who is to blame.

²⁰ Susan M. Heitler, *From Conflict to Resolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 47.

is—then we Jesuits to a significant degree are a less than healthy group. In addition, to raise the issue of community health and discuss it openly in an effective manner implies a high degree of trust among community members. However, when confronted by issues stirring up in us emotional states, we Jesuits often seem to have difficulty trusting. Far too often our response is to intellectualize or spiritualize away the conflicts before us.

A second reason why we do not openly discuss community health, I think, is that focusing on the quality of our community life would require each of us to face directly the frustrations, pains, and disappointments we have experienced in Jesuit life. We have all grown too accustomed to the denial and defensive strategies (workaholism, excessive television watching, and the like) that we employ in our day-to-day Jesuit lives in order to avoid our personal hurt and disappointment. If we started really to talk to one another and dialogue on many pressing issues, then we would sooner or later have to confront our own pain. For many, this is simply too frightening to acknowledge, much less discuss.

Thesis 3: Living the vow of chastity is inextricably tied to the quality of our community life as loving brothers.

Our understanding of Jesuit life has come a long way since Ignatius succinctly discussed the vow of chastity in the Constitutions! Fortunately, contemporary theological and psychological understandings of the person have broadened considerably our notion of the chaste life. A complete definition of the chaste life incorporates several dimensions: (1) refraining from genital sexual expression, (2) self-acceptance, (3) mature affective relating in everyday behaviors, (4) growing altruistic attitude and generative stance, and (5) health.²¹

My focus here is the essential linkage between chaste living and quality community living. In my clinical work as a psychologist and in pastoral work as a priest, I have encountered several

²¹ For behavioral indices that reflect this definition, see Shelton, "Reflections," 43f.

cases of marital infidelity. Often such infidelity results from the hurt one partner feels toward the other partner because of the other's behavior. At times such feelings are warranted, at times they are not; and the injured partner needs to consider the degree of his or her own responsibility in the relationship. (Usually, of course, the responsibility for the hurt is mutual.) Blame notwithstanding, I find it surprising how often negative feelings play a role in marital infidelity. Generally, I think such a dynamic is equally valid for Jesuit life. Jesuits are loving men and loving men do fall in love. Having such feelings is part of healthy living. What I want to stress, however, is the infidelity to the vow that results, not because of falling in love, but at least in part because of the hurt and anger a Jesuit experiences from the ongoing disappointment, frustration, and isolation he experiences from community life.²² Although I neither excuse nor lightly dismiss violations of the vow, I want to say that such behavior is at least in some ways understandable, given the power of negative feelings to motivate behavior. For a married couple to be chaste and happy in their marriage, there is need for both spouses to be loving and caring. Why should a vowed commitment to the Society be any different? If a Jesuit is to remain chaste and live the chaste life in a healthy and happy way, does he not need a community that is loving and supportive? In other words, chastity is too significant in our lives to leave simply to the man. In some sense there must exist also a "communal chastity" exemplified by communal dialogue and the community's love and support of the man.

If we want to ensure the integrity of the vow of chastity, then there are two prerequisites. First, we must foster a desire and corresponding attempt on a personal level to live the chaste life in a healthy way and to pray for such graces. Second, we must do everything possible on a communal level to create envi-

²² I want to emphasize that a person must manifest responsibility and that negative feelings cannot condone or absolve one of such responsibility. I am simply trying to address an understanding of why such behavior might take place.

ronments where each of us feels supported by and bonded with our brothers. Such an environment fosters an atmosphere where we can share joys and hurts and provides the fundamental care each of us needs to be a healthy and whole human being. To state this another way, being chaste men ideally means being healthy men and living in healthy environments. Failure on either the personal or the communal fronts will inevitably lead to unhealthy coping styles (for example, cynicism, substance abuse) in a man's personal attempts to live the vow of chastity and conceivably prompt some men to engage in genital sexual expression.²³

III. Towards a Definition of Healthy Community Living

Having discussed the importance of community, we must now examine more specifically what constitutes such a community. Speaking as a clinical psychologist, I thus define a healthy Jesuit community:

A group of fragile men of faith interacting with one another on an ongoing basis and bonded to one another by their vowed commitment. The focus of this commitment is to foster a corporate apostolate that serves the Church community through the Society's mission of availability and service. This vowed commitment is sustained and nourished through a quality interaction allowing for increasingly honest dialogue, ongoing personal growth, and growing community bonding, all resulting in a climate providing

²³ Though I stress here the vow of chastity, both the vows of poverty and obedience can be tied to a healthy community life. When a Jesuit feels needy and lonely, he might attempt to "fill up" such voids through material possessions. Likewise, such negative emotional states might also tempt a Jesuit to invest emotionally in externs, thus leading him to believe that he has to be around such people and reducing his availability for missioning. In either case, I suggest unhealthy community conditions might compromise one's behavior and attitude in living the vows.

*increasing spiritual and psychological maturity for each community member.*²⁴

I beg the reader's pardon for the length of this definition, but there are several points I wish to emphasize: our fragility, support for apostolic service, shared dialogue, health, and ongoing growth. In order to be more specific about what healthy Jesuit community life entails, I offer below some characteristics that could help us bring it about.

1. Praying Together

Perhaps some will disagree; but I have lived in several Jesuit communities, and with few exceptions I have not really found communal prayer to be a satisfying experience. Perhaps this has something to do with our temperaments and our diversity; perhaps it is my own fault; perhaps both factors are at play. Nonetheless, we should encourage experimentation in community prayer; and, where a community finds something that is meaningful for its spiritual life, then it should make this a regular feature of its routine. On the other hand, most Jesuits highly value the community Eucharist. I have more than once heard brothers (and it most certainly is my own experience) state that something special exists when Jesuits gather for the Eucharist. It is not easy to specify how often the entire community should come together for liturgy, but once a week (often before a community meal or meeting) often seems to work best.

There are several reasons why such gatherings are important for our communal lives. First, the Jesuit is drawn beyond his own personal piety to experience the community at prayer. We Jesuits are not only prayerful men, we are also a community of prayerful men. Second, the Jesuit is able to experience his broth-

²⁴ I know of no Jesuit community that totally fits this definition. However, I do know several that are in the process of trying more and more to realize this definition in their own community living. Obviously, realizing a healthy Jesuit community is a process that is ongoing and never really complete.

ers as prayerful men in a very conscious way. He is able to view his brothers as more than just colleagues and companions; they, like him, are men of prayer. Third, there exists in such Eucharistic experiences a focus that transcends the self. A communal Eucharist is a shared meal where bonding reaches beyond immediate concerns and worries. The dynamic of the community Eucharist symbolizes a unity that encompasses the wider Society and the praying Church. Most Jesuits are busy men; if our work and personal interests fail to provide a communal setting for the Eucharist, however, then such activities are a “disguised good” and must be labeled as such. Baldly stated, how are we optimally to bear witness to the Gospel if we cannot even find time to be a praying community?

2. Forum for Community Dialogue

Even a cursory reading of the Society’s early history demonstrates that the first companions managed to spend “quality time” together. Moreover, a consistent theme of recent Society documents is the importance of ongoing quality dialogue among Jesuits. It is time to face this issue squarely. Healthy Jesuit living-in-community requires quality communal dialogue (yes, the flag word “meetings”). By quality dialogue I mean regular agreed-upon times where brothers gather together to share various spiritual and personal aspects of their lives.²⁵ If we make no efforts to model our communities in this way, then we perpetuate the “vertical Jesuit syndrome” and consign ourselves to a hotellike or men’s-club type of existence.

I simply do not believe that this “vertical existence” can be reconciled with a contemporary understanding of our life. Nearly three decades after Vatican II called for a renewal of religious life, we Jesuits can appropriate such renewal through group dialogue in our apostolic communities. Though we have made some com-

²⁵ I label this experience a “shared group process” or “shared group dialogue.”

munity advances on this front, much remains to be done. We must learn how to start talking to one another in a meaningful way, one that incorporates shared dialogue. In many instances, depending on age, temperament, and interests within the community, this dialogue might not be able to take place without outside facilitators, at least initially.²⁶ The all too convenient excuses of "I'm too busy" and "I wasn't trained to understand Jesuit living in that way" are wearing thin with many members of the Society.

There are several reasons why such shared dialogue is necessary for healthy Jesuit community life. First, from a strictly pragmatic standpoint, the Society is getting smaller. As this decline continues we are going to be rubbing shoulders when new physical structures reflect this decreasing size. We might as well learn to talk together, since it is going to be the growing reality of our lives!

Second, for Jesuits in their forties and younger, communal dialogue is their norm for understanding Jesuit life. Like it or not, it is the future of the Society. Jesuit formation for the past few decades has given this dialogue a priority through formative experiences. In my view, it is becoming more and more intolerable to provide men with such human and growthful experiences and then expect them to leave formation and enter ongoing apostolic communities where such group dialogue is lacking. I am personally pained at the number of my peers who are hurting, frustrated,

²⁶ My impression is that Jesuits in formation and in smaller Jesuit apostolic communities where the men freely choose this more personal life-style of Jesuit living might be able (though not always) to initiate and sustain this shared dialogue without the need for an outside facilitator. I do believe, though, that in most cases the state of our apostolic communities is such that few of them could initiate and sustain this process without outside consultation. There is too much hurt, disappointment, and defensiveness in too many of us for this to take place without facilitation. Furthermore, my own experience is that Jesuits often do not know how to talk with one another in group dialogue and do not know how to challenge or express negative feelings in a loving way.

and angry over less than adequate communities.²⁷ Let me restate that I am not speaking about any “perfect” Jesuit community. No such community exists. But is it too much to ask that brothers spend time in quality conversation?²⁸ Third, though in the long run shared dialogue will become more the norm, some men, I am afraid, will not wait that long. If communities do not begin to initiate this quality dialogue together, then more men will continue to vote with their feet and leave the Society. I suspect one reason for their departure is that at a psychological level men feel there simply is no hope. The reasoning is more or less as follows: “If these guys can’t even talk to one another, then what am I doing here?” I realize that this statement is crudely phrased, but I do think it honestly captures some departing men’s feelings and at least to some degree explains some men’s departures.

3. *Intervention*

An important force in clinical psychology is the “community-psychology movement,” whose focus of study is the relationships and complex interactions taking place between individuals and social systems (for instance, neighborhoods, cities). An inte-

²⁷ One phenomenon I have increasingly noticed is the way some of my peers (men in their thirties and forties) deal with problems in community living. When missioned to an apostolate, they often resort to one or more of the following strategies: (a) they get overly involved in their work and professional lives, (b) they spend most of their time with non-Jesuits, or (c) they move into student residence halls and live their daily lives with late adolescents. Again, one must ask what **long-term consequences** of such behavior these men will experience in their Jesuit life? At the same time, I am in sympathy with these men’s choices if the alternative is a very difficult living situation within the community.

²⁸ I do not mean to imply that developing such a group dialogue will be easy. Some readers might have been “burned” in previous efforts to create shared dialogue within their communities. I am suggesting, though, that such dialogue is worth the risk and that the benefits derived far outweigh any risk. Obviously, for any such dialogue to succeed, each member of the group needs motivation and goodwill, as well as other supports, like an outside facilitator.

gral aspect of community psychology is the use of intervention approaches that attempt to reduce mental-health problems within the social system. As we already pointed out, mental-health issues are an aspect of many Jesuit's lives. It is an understatement to conclude that we as a **community** have been remiss in intervening in the lives of our brothers when they are hurting or when their behaviors are destructive of community life. Far too often we have waited until a crisis or scandal has occurred before taking appropriate action. One of the greatest faults of the Society is its hesitancy to intervene effectively in the lives of hurting brothers. This benign neglect has wounded us deeply.

A criterion for a healthy Jesuit community in the nineties and on into the twenty-first century is its willingness and capacity to intervene in the lives of hurting brothers. Given the number of potential problems as well as the condition of our communities, it is not possible to spell out any one formula or procedure. Minimally, this would entail the willingness of the superior to take action, discussion among the house consultors of various problem behaviors, communication with and backing by the provincial and his staff of actions taken by the superior and his consultors (and vice versa), and enlistment of other professionals when appropriate. Perhaps more than anything it includes an understanding among community members of what behaviors are acceptable and what are unacceptable; within this context, some behaviors clearly present themselves as incompatible with our way of proceeding (for example, rarely being present within the community). Naturally, in order to form such consensus on healthy behaviors, community members need to be in dialogue with one another! I am hopeful that in the future we can evolve to the point (and some communities are ahead of others in this regard) where the group as a whole or in part can intervene to help a man (for instance, compassionately challenging him regarding substance abuse).

4. *Boundaries*

A serious concern I have about Jesuit life is the number of burned-out Jesuits I see, especially at the end of the school year. As they decline in numbers, Jesuits find more and more demands made upon their time. Our apostolic energies have always been overtaxed. One need only read the letters of Canisius to have a proof of this. For the most part we Jesuits are talented, hardworking, and generous men, a combination that elicits the overcommitment and drained energies that are commonplace to many of us. My point is, though, that establishing healthy boundaries is not just an individual task. It is also a service the community needs to provide for the man. A Jesuit needs both physical and psychological distance from his work; and the best guarantee that he will enjoy such distance lies in a community that is inviting and caring—a place where the Jesuit desires to spend time because he truly enjoys just being with his brothers and enjoying the growthful, positive experiences the community provides.

I would propose that an apt image for a Jesuit community is that of a **centripetal affection**. “Centripetal” speaks to an inner energy, a magnetic pull, a drawing together. “Affection,” on the other hand, refers to feelings, desires, and interior self-awareness. The combination of these two concepts, centripetal affection, refers to the climate of the Jesuit community as a welcoming dynamic that naturally elicits the Jesuit’s desire to be present. The Jesuit feels “at home” in community because of the vision it articulates and the members who sustain the vision and the communal experiences that nourish it.

5. *Personal Growth*

Though I do believe that the future Jesuit life-style will entail sharing more experiences, there is no denying our own individuality. Each of us, on the basis of his temperament and learning history, has a wide variety of needs, desires, and interests. Ultimately, if a Jesuit is to feel bonded and appreciated, he is going to have to satisfy some personal needs and interests that

serve to enhance his personal identity and self-esteem and his community must allow for this diversity. Here are some key questions for each community to ask itself: How does the climate of our community allow each man to mature both spiritually and psychologically? How can we as a community support each man's mature growth?

6. Tolerance

A Jesuit friend once remarked that living in a Jesuit community was an act of faith. He meant that Jesuits are so diverse that only grace can really hold us together and withstand the centrifugal forces that fling us apart. Some of these forces are obvious; any Jesuit who has taken the Myers-Briggs understands the premature judgments and misunderstandings that can arise among introverts and extroverts. Political ideologies, food preferences, and personal life-style habits can be sources of division within a house.²⁹ But the issue is deeper. A community's tolerance is evidenced by a climate that (a) allows for discussion of "taboo topics" such as questions of poverty, life-style, and sexuality; (b) fosters a dialogue that enables each member to more clearly understand his brothers; and (c) encourages mature adult behaviors such as serious discussions and compassionate challenging, and discourages immature behaviors such as gossiping, dishonesty, and passive-aggressive responding.

7. Sharing an Apostolic Vision

Jesuit community has an apostolic focus; consequently, one goal for community members is to shape an apostolic vision. In

²⁹ In today's media age tolerance for another's ideas takes on special significance. When we believe we have the market on truth, it becomes all too easy to declare a "moral holiday" on other virtues such as tolerance, prudence, and charity. The result is publicly challenging brother Jesuits through the electronic (television) or print media (letters to the editor). Such statements can easily slide into rancor and cause much pain and divisiveness within the community.

some communities this is done in part by interaction between the head of the apostolate and the wider community. Still, more dialogue is clearly needed. How many Jesuits go about their work without feeling a sense of corporate mission? How many Jesuits do what they do because of their talents in a given area rather than because of a felt sense of communal missioning? What is needed is taking seriously the call to envision our work as a communal enterprise (a corporate apostolate) rather than just an individual's endeavor. Given the breadth of the Society's works and the diversity of community structures, how to do this might vary widely. Nonetheless, in the community's consciousness, whether it be through discussions, forums, meetings, or any other means, there must be a specific focus on the vision the community is attempting to shape and bring to fruition. What issues does the community by its apostolic energies hope to advance? How does this vision fit in with the contemporary Society's focus on a faith that does justice? Obviously again, to investigate the nature of our vision implies the capacity to engage one another in dialogue regarding personal apostolic desires.³⁰

8. Dialogue with Lay Colleagues

One sign of community health is the quality of the community's relationship with lay colleagues. Many communities have made great strides in this area over the past two decades. Obviously, hospitality is a key issue here. How welcoming is the community? From another perspective, how able is the community to draw upon the expertise of those in the wider apostolic community and receive input and perspectives that would assist the com-

³⁰ A good case in point for apostolic vision was the murder of our brothers in El Salvador. Imagine if every Jesuit at the time of these murders had been part of a shared group process. Think about how each of us could have shared in the group our anger, pain, and shock over these murders of our brother Jesuits. Think how such openness and sharing of feelings would have bonded us as brothers, created solidarity with the Central American Province and the wider Society, and led to deeper questions and discussion about what we as an apostolate were about.

munity to expand its own vision? Perhaps a somewhat threatening but useful question is, How open are we as a community to learning from our lay colleagues?

9. Accountability

I have no exact definition of this term; but, if we are more and more going to share our lives together, then it seems that accountability will become more central to Jesuit life. The very phrase "healthy Jesuit community" implies some type of normative behaviors that are expected and others that are excluded. What form such accountability takes will vary depending on the size of a community and the climate within the house. As we grow smaller, our dialogue with one another will, I believe, feature more open inquiry and challenges. A shared accountability will include expectations we have of one another to make commitments to certain agreed-upon community activities. Ideally, it will include discussions among community members regarding personal habits and life-styles. To give an example of this last point, my own apostolic endeavors involve four areas: academic, clinical, writing/research, and pastoral work. Obviously, each of these could become full-time work. I must be open to brother Jesuits when they inquire how I juggle all four and be open as well to hearing from them when I am doing too much. I also believe that in "my time" I need to be accountable. I can conceivably see myself talking to the community about what direction I should go. (What area do my brothers think I should stress? If I need to curtail an area, then which one should it be?) I need also to consider how my own work "fits" the community's apostolic vision, so as to avoid being only my own individualistic enterprise.³¹

³¹ Some Jesuits might react negatively to what they view as an intrusion of others into how they expend their apostolic energies and commit their time. I would simply suggest that any Jesuit having such negative reactions reflect seriously on the role of "individualism" in his life and ask himself whether perhaps such individualism is given too high a priority.

IV. An Experience of Shared Communal Dialogue

I have spoken of the need for Jesuits to really talk to one another in terms of a shared group dialogue. I would like now to (a) offer an example of such dialogue, (b) discuss in personal terms the “effects” of such dialogue, and (c) set forth why such dialogue is essential for Jesuit living today.

A. Background and Functioning

Over the past four years I have been part of an ongoing group process in the Regis Jesuit University Community. This process began in 1985 when the rector called together all Jesuits in the university community for a week-long series of meetings. An outside consultant trained in human-behavior dynamics attended the meetings as a facilitator. Three questions were proposed to the members of the Regis University Community from the very beginning to provide focus for the conversations: (1) What are your personal needs in relation to the community and your ministry? (2) What can we do to help each other meet these needs? (3) What can our community do to help those we serve through the college meet their needs better? The assumption was that Jesuits’ needs must be adequately met before they can adequately give themselves fully to the service of others; for needs, if they are legitimate and healthy and remain unfulfilled, will inevitably impair Jesuits’ health, performance, and relationships. In short, examining needs is vital for optimal commitment to the *magis*.

To enable the members of the group to develop their communication skills and self-understanding, as well as to render the group sessions more profitable, the suggestion was made that at the start of many of the sessions the members ask themselves the following four questions before anyone else spoke: (1) What is on my mind at this time? (2) While this is on my mind, what are my feelings or emotions? (3) What have I been doing with these feelings or emotions? (4) Is there anything I want or need from members of this group? Especially in the morning sessions, the group

found it helpful to give each participant a chance to answer these questions aloud without any elaborations. After listening to everyone, the members could see which person or issue appeared to deserve most immediate response.

Though I was not present at this initial series of meetings (at the time of this meeting I was in doctoral studies in clinical psychology), comments from others indicate that the sessions were intense, informative, and at times painful. Those present shared much anger and hurt. Like their brethren everywhere, Jesuits at Regis were individuals with no experience of shared communal dialogue; some Jesuits carried within themselves wounds and hurts from their personal and Jesuit lives and found this particular format difficult. From this initial series of meetings, the Jesuits in the university community agreed to meet on a biweekly basis. As time passed, several Jesuits, for a variety of reasons, dropped out of the group.

I joined the group four years ago. During my second year in the group, we decided to alter the frequency of our meetings from biweekly to weekly. During these four years several Jesuits have left the community to assume other assignments, while others have joined the Regis apostolate and the group. We invited all Jesuits working in the university apostolate and those working in other apostolates to join the group, as well as those who were retired. At present all Jesuits who work full-time in the university (administrators, staff, and faculty) are part of the group. All Jesuits agree to block out late Wednesday afternoons for these meetings. Men are faithful in attending, though of course at times they may encounter circumstances precluding their attendance (for example, travel). Currently, the group consists of twelve Jesuits ranging in age from their mid-thirties to their early seventies.

In addition to our weekly meetings, we meet at least once a year for a full three days together and also for a one-day session at the beginning of each semester. We arrange our schedules in advance so that we can be present. Again, we bring in an outside facilitator for these additional meetings.

The format of our meetings is, roughly, as follows: The meetings last for an hour and a half. At the beginning of the meetings, we set aside a brief period for announcements. At this time any member of the group is free to make any pertinent comments. These are usually factual statements about things going on involving the man and his apostolic Jesuit life or things going on at the university that are important for the community to know. After this period the format follows one of two paths. In any six-week period we set aside four meetings for business or discussion of various issues. These could include university issues, concerns about Jesuit life (for instance, vocation recruitment, social justice), or business pertaining to the community (at present we are engaged in building a new community residence, so time is often taken up with planning the structure and talking about how we want to live together).

The other two meetings during this six-week period are filled with what has become known as a "How Am I?" session. At these two meetings each Jesuit takes a turn and shares what has been going on with him personally since the last time we had a "How Am I?" session. Usually a man talks to some degree about his spiritual life and then shares anything he wishes about his personal life (for example, his health, a crisis in his family, a matter of personal concern). There are no rules on what can be brought up; it is up to the man. After each man speaks, individual members of the group offer comments, ask questions, or share insights based on their observations of the man's behavior or presentation. Usually it takes about two meetings to get through these more personal sessions, but sometimes it takes longer. The schedule for the meetings is not carved into stone. For example, as has happened a few times, something might have happened to a member of the group that he desires to share with the rest during one of the more business- or issue-oriented meetings. If this is the case, he simply tells the group at the beginning of the meeting, "I need some time," and then takes as long as he needs. (Some of our most fruitful discussions have come from these unexpected interruptions.) In other words, the group tries to live a

cura personalis that attends to the legitimate needs and desires of each man.

Once a month we end our meeting with a liturgy and we end every meeting with a short prayer. Once a month we also try to spend a little longer at dinner together in order to enjoy one another's company. I have noticed that we do not limit our discussions to the meetings. Among the fruitful results of the meetings are small-group discussions at other meals about what had gone on at the previous meetings, as well as private, informal two-man discussions about issues or concerns raised at earlier meetings. The upshot of these scheduled meetings and subsequent informal discussions has been a networking within the group and a shared basis of communication (common shared knowledge) facilitating further discussions and encouraging an experience of Jesuits really "talking to one another."

I do not want to idealize this group experience. At times I am tired and would prefer not to meet. As I sit in the group, I have sometimes caught myself questioning others' statements, or feeling that some talk too much and others not enough. Sometimes I am frustrated by all the intellectualizing (at which we Jesuits excel) and the avoidance of underlying feelings. I must confess I still have moments when I wonder if some of what we do is not "game playing," if we are avoiding real issues.³² No doubt we still have a long way to go. Nonetheless, on balance, my experience of the group is very positive. We are a typical cross section of the Society in terms of training, age, and interests; and I think I speak for the group when I say we have made progress in really talking to and hearing one another and are aware of a growing bond of trust forming within the group.

³² I do not mean this in a critical way. Any married couple's relationship requires a gradual opening up and sharing; forming trust in a relationship takes time. Couples often resort to "scripts" in their relating with one another. It is not surprising, then, that a group of Jesuits will also intellectualize and have to learn this trust.

B. Personal Effects

As I have reflected on my experience in the group, I have been able to pinpoint several experiences that have enhanced me personally and have contributed to my growth in and understanding of Jesuit life. From a strictly personal standpoint, I list below the effects this group has had on my Jesuit life.

1. I have experienced the Society in a new way. My previous experiences in apostolic communities were often (though not always) limited to individual friendships and a more or less hotellike atmosphere. This new experience of the Society has been valuable.

2. The shared group dialogue provides an opportunity for healing as other brothers have shown me care and concern. In turn, this healing has ameliorated painful feelings I have felt as a Jesuit. In other words, it takes brother Jesuits to heal the hurts of Jesuit life, and this shared group process has provided a forum in which this healing can take place.

3. I have felt a growing sense of humility. As I listen to other men share the joys and hurts of their own lives, I come to see that my own judgments of others are at times premature. The old adage is true: To know all is to forgive all.

4. Our weekly meetings have led me to bond more deeply with the Society and its ideals.

5. I have sensed the emergence of a growing sense of trust.

6. Unhealthy defenses are modified. Through comments others have helped me to see that I do not always live my Jesuit life in the most healthy way and led me to alter my distorted perceptions and initiate positive behavioral changes. Furthermore, the acceptance of the group reinforces my resolve to address my shortcomings. In turn, I feel I have permission to challenge others within the group.

7. By accepting me as I am, a frail man with talents and faults, others validate my self-esteem.

8. Because of the above, I have grown in self-acceptance.

9. I have learned how to **talk with** brother Jesuits better.

10. I feel more **grateful** for my vocation. I feel that the group has enriched me and experience it as central to my Jesuit life.

11. I feel **hopeful**. If we can continue to trust more as a group and share our lives together, then I feel that the Society does have a future.

12. Increasingly I experience my apostolic endeavors as part of a **corporate** undertaking rather than simply as my own personal work.

By listing these outcomes I do not mean to speak for the group as a whole, though through informal discussions I know that other group members feel many of these effects (and perhaps others) to varying degrees. What I would ask the reader to consider, however, is the impact that such positive experiences might have on Jesuit life. Are not experiences such as self-acceptance, trust, gratitude, and so forth essential for our **optimal growth** as apostolic men and vital for healthy living?

Despite these personal effects from a shared-group-dialogue process, the process itself does give rise to questions such as, How does such a shared group process affect the missioning of men to the apostolate? If a community takes seriously such a process and forms a cohesive identity, then can men simply be missioned to the community who do not wish to be part of the process? What effects would such missioning have on the community? Will the evolution of Jesuit life require the provincial to dialogue not only with a rector but with a community? What are the implications of such dialogue for the administration of the Society? What form does accountability assume in such a shared group process? Is a rector or a superior accountable in some ways to a shared group consensus? What is the role of the rector or the superior in a community where the group increasingly share responsibilities? What is the role of consultants in a community that incorporates a shared group process? What does it mean to be discerning men within such a process? I do not have settled answers to these provocative questions. Yet, over the next few decades, as the Society continues to shrink and we as individuals

and communities more and more appropriate healthy and adult ways of living, I suspect that questions such as these will take on greater significance for our Jesuit lives. If this is indeed the case, then should we not begin to address these questions now, talking openly about what it means not only to be healthy adults individually, but also healthy communities communally?

C. The Dynamics of Community Living

Why is a shared group dialogue essential for a healthy Jesuit life? We noted earlier that a “brotherly communion” requires such honest dialogue for a more authentic expression of Jesuit life. However, I propose also that such a shared group dialogue is necessary for healthy growth in the everyday living of our Jesuit life. I would like to illustrate this thesis in terms of the dynamics of everyday community living.

Every individual has the need to be accepted. Such self-acceptance fosters self-esteem, which can be loosely defined as a subjective feeling of self-appreciation or a felt sense of inner goodness. Unfortunately, human living always leads to diminished self-esteem, because every human being experiences a certain amount of rejection in life. So complex is everyday living that each of us will encounter at times people or situations wherein we are misjudged, misunderstood, felt to be inadequate to the task.

Because of the number and diversity of admission requirements and role expectations for different groups, and because of the divergent nature of human beings, it is simply illogical to expect any one individual to be equally adept at satisfying the varied demands of all groups in which membership is either required or desired.³³

In short, we neither do everything well nor win acceptance from everyone we meet. Invariably misperceptions and failures

³³ Richard L. Bednar, M. Gawain Wells, and Scott R. Peterson, *Self-Esteem: Paradoxes and Innovations in Clinical Theory and Practice* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1989), 95. I adapt their clinical model for rejection as the basis for my discussion of rejection in community (see pages 94–99).

heighten feelings of rejection. Such experiences originate early in life as we seek self-validation from parents and other significant people. But we cannot possibly meet everyone's expectations all the time or expect others' perceptions and understanding of us to be always accurate. Consequently, feeling rejection from such failures and misjudgments, we fashion a style of relating that shields us from this rejection. In essence, every Jesuit constructs an elaborate and intricate defensive style that allows him to withdraw and evade certain questions, people, and situations that prove too painful.

These responses give rise to a certain style of relating to others and certain distinctive behaviors that provide a protective inner core against feelings of rejection. Each one of us entered the Society with such a style already in place. My point is, though, that the Society itself is to some degree an experience of rejection for every Jesuit. No Jesuit will be totally successful in everything he does, nor will every Jesuit he meets or lives with understand and accept him to the degree he wishes. The reality of community life is that there are just too many people who do not know us well, all of whom make judgments and have expectations of us. The sheer number of Jesuits, not to mention the diversity of their interests and work, render these misunderstandings inevitable, a part of the reality of living.³⁴

³⁴ This reality hit home for me when I was able to spend a considerable period of time with my former college roommate (who is not a Jesuit). Our time together was marked by openness, trust, and deep communication. This friend knows me as well as anyone else does. When I came back to the community, I was struck by the subtle but underlying tension I experienced. Though I had friends in the Regis community, I could not possibly relate to all these men as I could to my college friend. Needless to say, many of the men I live with I do not know that well; with others, however, I have cultivated various degrees of friendship. I soon found myself employing my typical defenses, making certain judgments (some of which can't help but be biased), and taking on the typical defensive style I have utilized in Jesuit life. I do not recount this incident to criticize Jesuit life. I am only maintaining that living with a group of people is bound to create for each of us at times experiences of misunderstanding, rejection, and avoidance behavior.

As a consequence, every Jesuit avoids others and to some degree withdraws to cope with his own personal experience of rejection. Rather than being an indictment of Jesuit life, this simply suggests that to be a Jesuit is to be human and therefore subject to the realities of everyday living, part of which is rejection.³⁵

The critical question becomes, though, **How does any Jesuit cope with the rejection he experiences and how do the avoidance/withdrawal behaviors he engages in influence his own mature growth?** I suggest below three healthy ways to confront this question.

First, the man can make a commitment to living in a healthy way by incorporating positive behavioral changes within his life, an ongoing process that requires continual effort. Such healthy living provides insight and ongoing self-examination of personal behavior. Nonetheless, left to our own resources, we are limited. Unconscious defenses are precisely that—unconscious—and some of these might be unhealthy and immune from self-scrutiny.

A second way to address these feelings of rejection is to maintain healthy friendships. Such relationships create feelings of self-acceptance as well as provide the intimacy fundamental for healthy living. However, such relationships are limiting in the sense that in friendship one gets the perspective of only one person, a perspective that is inevitably narrow at times and perhaps biased. Friendship can allow for great trust and intimacy, yet it is

³⁵ One can easily prove the reality of this "rejection theory." Pause for a few moments and image in your mind every community you have lived in as a Jesuit. Spend a few moments with each one of them. Then think of the words "disappointment," "misunderstanding," and "hurt." Recall the people and situations in each of the communities where you have lived that are linked with these words. Ask yourself how you dealt with these feelings of rejection, what behaviors these feelings fostered. I would submit that, even though you might be able to identify some avoidance behaviors, more than likely you have incorporated other behaviors of which you are unaware. I would also submit that any Jesuit who does this exercise and cannot recall instances of rejection and hurt is most likely exhibiting a considerable degree of denial (which in this context is an unhealthy defense to utilize!).

limited by the life histories of the two parties involved. Moreover, one is apt to be friends with others who share similar interests; consequently, in such friendships the Jesuit neither confronts rejection directly nor deals with the withdrawal and defensive strategies he commonly employs in his day-to-day Jesuit life. Furthermore, in such friendships a man is safely able to avoid other Jesuits who he feels have rejected him.

A third way to deal constructively with such rejection is by investing oneself in a group process as described above.³⁶ A group process can provide a man with a diversity of perspectives and insights. In a shared group process a Jesuit usually encounters brother Jesuits with whom he normally does not invest regularly in a deeply personal interaction. Oftentimes some of these men might have contributed to his wounded feelings, allowing him to confront in this group situation his own feelings of rejection. Through shared dialogue the man is apt to see that his judgments and perceptions are not entirely accurate or at least are not the whole story. Most likely some of these perceptions have fostered the avoidance behaviors he displays on a regular basis. With time, as trust increases, the group is able to intrude into a man's consciousness in a positive way, enabling him to feel accepted for who he is. Ideally, a group can offer constructive insight and compassionate challenge, enabling each one to confront his own defensiveness. Thus each confronts and to some degree dissipates the rejection that characterizes his life and opens himself to increased feelings of trust and bonding with the group as he grows in self-acceptance and experiences the Society in this new way.

To state this another way: The fundamental dynamic of rejection and subsequent avoidance each of us experiences in Jesuit life can partly be ameliorated only through

³⁶ A fourth way, of course, is to enter psychotherapy. At times this might be a very helpful pursuit as a way to gain insight and most certainly should be encouraged if the man or friends consider it warranted. At the same time, a Jesuit should not expect therapy with a psychologist or psychiatrist to substitute for the everyday relationships of Jesuit life.

shared group dialogue. Without this experience each of us inevitably goes his own way, solidifying his own defensive style, and falls prey to an excessive individualism and personal style of coping that are fatal to healthy community living (the vertical Jesuit syndrome). It is the lack of shared group dialogue and unchallenged avoidance behaviors, I believe, that perpetuate the hotellike atmosphere characterizing our apostolic community life today.³⁷ The individualistic course we all have more or less adopted has allowed for some fine individual accomplishments, yet it has wounded us deeply and blunted our attempts to discover what it means to lead communally healthy and whole lives as loving brothers. **There can be no more important goal in the United States Assistancy today than directing all possible resources at developing such a shared group dialogue in every Jesuit community.**³⁸

No doubt instituting such a group dialogue will not always be easy. Sadly, in some communities it might be impossible, given the age, training, or temperaments of the men involved. Admittedly, my own experience as described above owed much to circumstances not often found in apostolic communities—a small number of Jesuits all focused on the same apostolate.

I do not want to downplay the difficulties of initiating or maintaining such a process over a period of time. Members will leave and new members will join the community; over the years this reigniting of the group process can be wearing. Then there is

³⁷ By “hotellike” I am not referring to an actual physical structure. Rather, I use this term to reflect the emotional isolation many Jesuits feel in their communities. The size of some of our communities necessitates physical structures that are to varying degrees hotellike. In some cases this might be unavoidable. What we need here is simply to realize that physical environments can foster isolation; larger Jesuit communities should discuss what can be done to counter such isolation.

³⁸ Province officials can aid communities by identifying facilitators for groups and encouraging all Jesuits to develop such groups wherever possible. I also recommend the establishment of a commission on Jesuit apostolic life in every province.

the simple reality that our energies wane as the year proceeds; and, if the year is not going well, then a group experience might loom as another draining of energies. Then of course there exists the daunting problem of large Jesuit communities attempting to form viable groups and create communities within communities.³⁹ Obviously, such developments are apt to create their own difficulties and misunderstandings. I list these difficulties because realism is necessary as we undertake such an enterprise. However, even more important, it would be an egregious error to use the size of the community or any other obstacle as an excuse for not attempting to form communities within communities. Even though there will be difficulties with such group formations, the time for talking has passed; now is the time for action. As we have already explained, such groups are vital not only for an authentic living of Jesuit life but also for our health. In my view, communities that refuse to form such groups are saying no to their own health and, in the long run, are imperiling their future survival as an optimally viable Jesuit apostolic community.

Wherever Jesuits live they can employ creative energies to foster such a shared group process, and every man should have such a process available to him. Of course, it is unrealistic to expect all men to be able or motivated to give time and energy to this process. So be it. Those Jesuits, however, who are so disposed should be given whatever resources are necessary to enable them to pursue such group formation. In large communities, as noted above, several groups might form.⁴⁰ Again, given the age and temperaments involved, the groups within the house might have a different focus. Some groups might stress faith sharing,

³⁹ By "communities within communities" I mean either the formation of several group processes all under the same rector or the establishment of several actual communities within a house, each participating in a shared group process and each with its own superior. I do not want to downplay the challenges or issues that arise from this framework.

⁴⁰ It is difficult to stipulate the maximum number of men for a group. Ten to fifteen most likely would represent the maximum.

whereas other groups might wish to combine such spiritual conversation with more personal sharing.

If one or a few Jesuits live in a community that does not wish to enter into or provide for such dialogue, then superiors should make every effort to allow these men to network with other nearby Jesuits or communities that are more open to this process. In the unfortunate event that a man is isolated within a community which refuses to engage in such a process and there exists no desire among other communities in the area to form such a group, then the man should be provided with extra resources (for example, personal funds for long-distance phone calls and some travel), so that he can network with other more supportive Jesuits who favor this more shared living of Jesuit life.

V. Final Reflections

The question of Jesuit community is such a vast topic that no article (or book) can treat it adequately. However, I have tried in this article to discuss just one aspect of Jesuit community, that of its health. I will end my reflections on this topic with three brief but essential points.

First, the health of a Jesuit community is inextricably tied to the health of individual community members. Consequently, each of us must do everything he can in order to lead a healthy and whole life.⁴¹ From a spiritual standpoint, this health is tied to personal conversion. Let me elaborate. We Jesuits have to start asking why we need our community. One hopes that it is more than just an environment providing the necessities and offering convenient resources for one's professional career or apostolic work. The sociologist Robert Bellah has accurately characterized the ethos of individualism that pervades American culture. As members of this culture, we Jesuits have been far too disposed to

⁴¹ For some characteristics of healthy Jesuits, see Shelton, "Reflections," 9–15.

adopt this ethos, I suspect. Ultimately, we have to admit that we are fragile men and that fragile men need one another. Without the conversion that allows us to admit our frailty and need, we are relegated to the individualism and emotional isolation of hotellike bachelor quarters that are so foreign to the spirit of the first companions and the contemporary spirit of the Society.⁴² We have to start with ourselves, but we cannot end there. We must be willing to address directly how we do relate and interact, because the environment in which Jesuits live weighs significantly on our personal and apostolic functioning.

Second, how the Society evolves will no doubt influence our commitment to future apostolic ventures. In some cases this will include terminating some apostolates and undertaking others. Yet I think it shortsighted for us to approach our future work simply in terms of the apostolate. We must also view the quality of the community life experienced by the men who engage in these apostolates. We must ask whether we can continue to ask men to live in unhealthy communities no matter how noble the apostolic service. What are the effects on these men, and will not living this way impair many of them to some degree? There are no easy answers to this question, for the question itself is so complex. Still, we must take quality community life into account when we discern the future of our apostolates as well as the assignment of men; and we must be prepared to ask the question, Is it not better to discontinue an apostolate if the only home environment

⁴² One of the most frightening aspects of seriously pursuing community health is that a province might have to confront the "family secret" of how psychologically impoverished it really is. That is, if we vigorously pursued the recommendations in these pages, I suspect we would find portions of many communities and perhaps most of some communities actively resisting focusing on community health or simply incapable of dealing with the issues raised here. This being the case, I suspect provinces will refuse to raise this issue to any degree and embrace instead a province-wide "family secret" which allows it to avoid acknowledging how serious the problem is.

available for the Jesuits involved is very unhealthy? At a minimum, we must make available alternative living options for Jesuits.

Finally, we must be more assertive in making changes. I do not doubt that future relationships among Jesuits will incorporate more shared responsibility and dialogue. To some degree, we might hope, a more healthy form of community life will emerge from the grass-roots desires of community members who will begin addressing issues raised in this article. Yet we must be realistic. Given the lethargy and hostility to such discussion, as well as the varying degrees of dysfunctionality evident in so many of our communities, I do think that province officials must increasingly take direct steps to facilitate change. I have no blueprint for how this might be done, but I can offer a few suggestions.

First, province officials can notify communities that they are expected to cultivate the shared group dialogue spoken of above (if they have not done so already). Furthermore, every community should undertake alterations and changes that foster a more interactive style of relating. These changes could include adapting physical structures to allow more humane ways of living, transferring men from communities that are openly hostile to group processes and forming alternative communities. I also recommend that every province appoint a commission on Jesuit apostolic living. The focus of this group should be to examine Jesuit lifestyles within the various province communities in a holistic way in order to encourage community environments that foster spiritual and psychological health. This commission should be in dialogue with communities within the province regarding healthy behaviors that communities are expected to foster and its apostolic work.⁴³ Province staffs would have authority to monitor the implementation of these guidelines. One direct consequence of these guidelines is that the assignment of men might be made contingent to some degree on community health: no new men would be

⁴³ Ideally, each community would foster "grass-roots" attempts to develop such behaviors. I doubt, however, that many of our apostolic communities are at the stage where this could be done.

assigned to any communities refusing for whatever reason to foster such health.

I realize that these statements might arouse negative reactions among some readers (as they most certainly will if they are implemented!), yet we need to take a stand decidedly in favor of community health and whatever it entails not only to promote our personal well-being but also to ensure the highest quality of apostolic service to the Church and God's people, a goal that is at the very heart of our companionship together. As we earlier stated, the quality of this service cannot be divorced from the question of the quality of our lives together as brothers, which is best reflected through the environment (community) in which Jesuits live.

One of the pivotal experiences of the Exercises is the struggle to acknowledge our brokenness and to experience God's love overwhelming whatever darkness has entered our life. This experience leads to interior freedom, a felt sense of gratitude and the desire to offer ourselves in service. Our experience of community, to some degree, reflects this dynamic. At times it is a struggle: there are many communal issues we Jesuits do not want to confront, some aspects of our lives together we would rather not acknowledge. We have lived far too long with our "family secrets." We are men with a common calling, a common joy, a common pain, and a common hope. Certainly, if the graces of our vocation mean anything, they mean we can have faith and trust in one another to begin this necessary dialogue in a systematic way throughout the assistancy. Let us use this decade to recommit ourselves to the vision of what we desire the Jesuit community of the twenty-first century to be: a place where Jesuits can share and draw strength from their common calling, their common joy, their common pain, and their common hope. There is no greater gift we can offer one another than the desire and good will to initiate this dialogue, to undertake this struggle, so that at last we can be more free to offer ourselves in service to the Lord and the people of God.

APPENDIX A

Below are questions designed to stimulate discussion about healthy community living.

● For Provincials, provincial staffs, and consultors

1. How might the province help individual communities set up a shared group process? What resources are we able to offer to facilitate this process?
2. Does the province have a policy on intervention for men who are hurting? Does it seek professional expertise in a preventive way? That is, do province officials bring in consultants to discuss difficult situations before issues arise (for instance, scandal)?
3. What initiatives has the province taken to help identify healthy adult behaviors? Has the province thought of setting up a commission to aid communities in this endeavor?
4. What are the criteria for judging whether a community provides a healthy environment for Jesuits who might be assigned there?
5. To what degree does the province utilize a "principle of health" in making assignments of men?⁴⁴
6. What are the "family secrets" in our province?

● For rectors or superiors, house consultors, and the community as a whole

1. What are the "family secrets" in our community?
2. What are the taboo topics in this community that we cannot openly discuss?

⁴⁴ See Shelton, "Reflections," 45-48.

3. If we as a community (given our history, present situation, and apostolic focus) had to write a definition of a healthy community, what would we write? (Be as specific as possible.) If we had to implement this definition within this community, what would we do? (Be as specific as possible.) What are the first steps we might take? Will we? What might prevent us from taking these steps? (Be as specific as possible.) How can we constructively deal with these obstacles? (Be as specific as possible.)
4. Do we as a community pray together?
5. Do we have a forum for a shared group dialogue? If not, what concrete steps need to be taken now to initiate this dialogue? How willing are we to employ an outside facilitator?
6. Does this community provide boundaries from work? Is the climate of this house inviting, a place where community members desire to spend time? Can we identify the sources of “centripetal affection” in our community? What can we do to increase them?
7. Can we begin to dialogue about what behaviors are expected of men within the community?
8. Who are the brothers within the community who are hurting? What is being done for them?
9. What is the policy in the house regarding intervention? Do we have one? How willing are we to draw upon outside experts?
10. How are men within the community called to be accountable? Does the community as a whole in any way exercise accountability?
11. How inviting and hospitable towards lay colleagues is the community?
12. How does the community enable each of its members to grow spiritually and psychologically?

13. To what degree does this community have a sense of an apostolic vision? a corporate sense of our work? a sense of corporate missioning?
14. How would we describe the “communal chastity” of our house?
15. To what degree does our community encourage the “vertical Jesuit syndrome”?

● **For individual Jesuits**

1. What can I do to encourage my community to be a community of prayerful men?
2. How willing am I to be part of a shared group process? What concrete steps can I take to initiate this process? If I am not open to this process, what might the reasons be? Could I at least try this process and give it the benefit of the doubt?
3. How am I accountable to my community?
4. If I am hurting, to whom in the community can I go?
5. Do I have boundaries from my work?
6. What rejections and hurts have I experienced in Jesuit life? What behaviors do I utilize in order to defend against such rejection? How would I characterize my own defensive style? How does this style hinder my bonding with the community?
7. Are there “family secrets” in the community with which I cannot deal comfortably? What are they? What topics of discussion make me uneasy? What might be the source of my reaction?

APPENDIX B

Below is a list of questions that might help a group of Jesuits begin a shared group dialogue together.⁴⁵

1. What is on my mind at this time?
2. While this is on my mind, what are my feelings or emotions?⁴⁶
3. What is my experience of this community at this moment?
4. What are my desires for my community? To what degree do I believe these desires can be fulfilled? What obstacles do I foresee?
5. What are the joys I have found in community life?
6. What are my hopes for the Society?
7. What things in life am I grateful for?
8. What are my gifts?
9. Where do I find support in my life here and now?
10. What is my experience of prayer?

For groups already formed and with some history of talking with one another, the following might prove helpful:

1. What is my experience of poverty? chastity? obedience?⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Community members might wish to respond to these questions one by one without feedback. My own experience, however, is that for most questions, the best interaction occurs when members who wish are allowed to comment upon a man's answers after he has replied to the questions. This fosters an interactive style and quality discussion.

⁴⁶ I am indebted to Father James Gill, S.J., for these first two questions.

⁴⁷ It is important here simply to focus upon the man's experience and not evaluate and pass judgment on it.

2. What is the story of my vocation? Who are the significant characters?
3. Talk about my parents and the effect that each has had on me.
4. Talk about Jesuit friendships in my life. Who are these men? What makes us friends?
5. What regrets do I have about my life?
6. How would I characterize the defensive style that I utilize in Jesuit life?
7. Who do I hope to be in ten years?
8. What hurts and rejections have I experienced in Jesuit life? (Be as specific as possible.) How did (do) I handle such experiences? Did (do) I judge my coping behaviors as healthy or unhealthy? Why?
9. How in this community do we hold one another accountable?
10. How does this community foster the "vertical Jesuit syndrome"?
11. How are we creating an apostolic vision? To what degree do we experience our apostolate as corporate?
12. What are my "psychological vulnerabilities"⁴⁸ or what behaviors of mine might I classify as unhealthy?
13. If we as a group wrote a behavioral description of the vows, what behaviors could we agree upon for each vow?⁴⁹
14. Can we identify the "centripetal affection" that draws us together in this community? What is it? (Be as specific as possible.)

⁴⁸ Shelton, "Reflections," 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 42-45.

15. What concrete behaviors can we agree upon that will ensure our spiritual and psychological health and ongoing maturity?
16. What is my reaction to the aging of the Society? our decline in manpower? our continuing departures? How do these trends influence the quality of our community life?
17. What are the important issues in this province? In what ways is the province addressing them? How adequate or inadequate had the province's response been?

Cándido de Dalmases, S.J.

Francis Borgia

Grandee of Spain, Jesuit, Saint. Translated by Cornelius Michael Buckley, S.J., from the Spanish El Padre Francisco de Borja (Madrid: B.A.C., 1983). First U.S. edition, 1991. 251 pp. + x, genealogy, glossary of names. No. 11 in the series.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

As a Jesuit and a psychologist, may I share my reflections on Charles M. Shelton, S.J.'s, "Reflections on the Mental Health of Jesuits," which appeared in the September 1991 issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*?

In this essay, as in all of his writings, Shelton's honesty and courage impresses his readers. Perhaps most immediately useful for individual and collective examination of consciousness or for reflecting on during one's annual retreat are the ten characteristics of Jesuit mental health (pp. 9-15). Shelton shows imagination, too, in coining new quasi-technical terms to capture his insights. Some of these include the distinction between Psychological Pelagianism and Psychological Quietism, his principle of limited tolerance and inverse popularity principle, and Jesuit Narcissism. I shall let the reader review Shelton's text and be reminded of the meaning of these terms, but I repeat the last of these because it is central to my own reflections here. "Jesuit narcissism" (p. 38n) is "unintended focus on achievements as a way to deny our pain or actual situation."

Shelton suggests a sober analysis of our collective mental and emotional health, plus some changes in "our way of proceeding." From my own experience and research, both formal and informal, I would concur with his major

hypothesis that "[t]he single greatest challenge facing the United States Assistancy today is the prevalence of mental-health issues (in all their degrees) in the lives of individual Jesuits." The non-psychologist reader may be tempted to write off this provocative statement with a curt "Just what a shrink would say"; but to read Shelton with even the smallest amount of open-mindedness—such as is mandated by Ignatius in his Presupposition to the *Spiritual Exercises*, §22—is to be convinced by his interpretation of the data and swayed to support his approach. "Jesuit narcissism" combined with American machismo, much more than lack of open-mindedness, could possibly prevent one from embracing Shelton's program. Ideally two motives would combine to overcome such a blockage: (1) compassion for each and all of us, both those suffering and all of us needing fuller human and spiritual growth and (2) the very "vocational integrity" of the Society itself (p. 30), whose community "reflects a deep commitment to apostolic availability and service to the Church."

Let me propose a descriptive continuum of community life in the Society. One pole is anchored by the idealistic vision of Decree 11 of the Thirty-second General Congregation, "The Union of Minds and Hearts." The other pole is summed up in Voltaire's cynical

comment that "Jesuits come together unknown; they live together unloved; they die alone unmourned." I feel certain each Jesuit has had moments of community living when he felt spontaneous hope that he was learning to incarnate with his brothers those ideals of GC32. I would wager that each of us at some dark times spontaneously recalled Voltaire's epigram, shuddered, and wondered whether that old atheist wasn't correct after all. Most of us most of the time live between these extremes. Shelton's penetrating observations would help us all move closer to the recommended "union."

Earlier I had recommended his ten characteristics of Jesuit mental health for our examens; now I add his behavioral descriptions of the three vows (pp. 42-44) for community discussion. One further concrete point under "Poverty" would be less discrepancy among lifestyles of different classes of Jesuits, those in college, high-school, parish, and retreat-house communities.

Shelton's most controversial but most essential suggestion, in my view, is that "[a] principle of health must be allowed significant weight in decisions about missioning" (p. 45). Again, Jesuit narcissism and machismo would keep the focus on "the work," but we continue to do so at our individual and collective personal and apostolic peril. The principle of health applies to both the man missioned and the community receiving him.

Here is another continuum to describe communities all of us have visited and inhabited—dovecote vs. snake pit. (What analogy would you use to describe your current place of residence, gentle reader?)

A mystery continuing to trouble all of us is why many of our younger, most talented priests continue to depart a few years after ordination. The "Arrupe month" has helped somewhat, but adopting Shelton's principle of health would go even further to preserve vocations. After five years in formation work, I believe that the reason for such early departures derives from the abrupt, even violent shift from living in the supportive, nurturing formation communities, with their faith sharing and emphasis on communal activities, into the emotional wastelands of many larger apostolic communities inhabited by workaholics (and other "-aholics") whose main focus is on the job (spiritualized as "the apostolate"). Young plants seem to wither and die—or transplant themselves into other soil.

My purpose in writing is to encourage a rereading of Shelton's essay and a personal and communal adoption of his viewpoint and suggestions.

William J. Sneck, S.J.
Loyola College
Baltimore, Md.

Editor,

I have long admired your patience and persistence in giving us *Studies*. And I wonder why so few readers' respond to your appeals for our reactions.

This is not my first response. However, I do not faithfully read each issue, because the subjects are often too erudite or esoteric. The May issue by Father D. Hassel, S.J., is an example: half way through I gave up on it. Perhaps I lack sufficient education and am not a scholar, but there are too many of my peers in the same boat.

Must everything now be dictated by social science? "Social scientists consider humans to be specifically different from all lower beings"—is that something new? The author is too influenced by the modern stress on "growth," "development," "expanding personality," which Aquinas, following Aristotle, identified as potency in action.

"Jesus is merely playacting" in the temple, at Satan's temptations,

the agony in the garden, depression before death, etc., unless these are truly "learning experiences" for him. Otherwise they are charades. Can you imagine Jerome, Augustine, our Ignatius (a genuine psychologist!) making such a distinction as Father Hassel does to tell us that our Lord was perfectly human?

Another of several irritants in the article tells me "what I will enjoy in heaven," my skills in music and art, mathematics and history, sports, dance, or drama will continue to grow in my risen existence, "since to obliterate these would be the loss of my human personality, my unique identity."

Marc Connelly's "Green Pastures" gave us a more attractive prospect with angels big and small, the fish fry, and de Lawd parading in top hat and cutaway, but not smoking de cigar He was given!

John J. Barrett, S.J.

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Antonio M. de Aldama, S. J., studied in Spain, Belgium, England, and Italy. He is a former secretary of the Society of Jesus, the post occupied earlier by Juan de Polanco, St. Ignatius's closest collaborator in writing the Constitutions. For forty years Father Aldama has devoted himself to research and publication on the history, life, and constitutional structure of the Society of Jesus.

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David L. Fleming, S.J., is the editor of *Review for Religious* and author of many articles on prayer, the religious life, spiritual direction, and retreats. He has been a member of the faculty of St. Louis University in St. Louis and of Weston School of Theology in Cambridge and has lectured extensively and given workshops both in the United States and abroad.

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